

Scabies

Scabies is a skin infection caused by tiny bugs called mites.

When the mite lands on a new person it can crawl about an inch a minute to the places it likes to burrow. Between fingers, at the wrist, armpits, breasts, genitals, skin folds, waist and toes are a few of the warm moist places it likes to live. It takes only three minutes for the mite to burrow into skin. As it crawls it gives off a chemical. This causes the itching.

The first time a person has scabies it takes at least two to six weeks for the itching to start. Meanwhile, the female mite lays about three eggs a day. The second time, the itching starts in about two days.

Scratching can lead to breaks in the skin and other infections. So, scabies can look like other skin rashes.

Itching, especially at night, is the main symptom of scabies.

How Do People Get Scabies?

Close contact with a person who has scabies, including sex, is one way. The mites can live for one to three days in fabric and dust.

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Is There a Test?

Your doctor can take a tiny scraping of skin and look under a microscope for the mites. Dark ink can be put on the skin and wiped away with alcohol — this makes the burrows of the mite show up clearly. All sex partners and family members living with a person with scabies must be tested, too.

What Is the Treatment for Scabies?

Special lotions that kill the mites and their eggs must be used. Follow the directions exactly. Be sure to put some lotion under finger and toe nails. Talk to your doctor and pharmacist about the treatments that are safe for you and your children. You may have to be treated more than once. Call your doctor if the itching does not stop one week after treatment.

For clothing, bedding, towels, rugs, and toys, wash and dry on the **hot** cycle of the washing machine if it is safe to do so. Dry cleaning also works. Things that can't be put in hot water may be wrapped in plastic bags and sealed for 3 or 4 weeks. (Without skin and blood to eat, the mites will die off and there will be no more eggs.)

A person who tells you that you have to be tested for scabies is honest, smart, and concerned about health. Thank them and get tested.

If you need this publication in an alternative format, please call 1-800-525-0127.

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